

Accountability under the Every Student Succeeds Act

David Griffith

Research and Policy Analyst

Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Topics for discussion

1. The goals of school rating systems
2. What's happening in Alabama
3. The dreaded “school quality” indicator

Possible goals of school rating systems

- To focus attention on schools where students are achieving at a high/low level
- To identify schools that are serving students well/poorly
- To help parents choose a school for their child



Focusing attention on schools where students are achieving at a low level

- Achievement is what counts (duh!)
- More resources may or may not be appropriate depending on the circumstances.
- Interventions may be counterproductive if school is high-growth.

Identifying schools that are serving students poorly

- **Growth is what counts**
- Achievement distorts the conversation
- Additional resources usually won't solve the problem
- Some sort of intervention may be warranted (e.g. replace principal or staff)

Helping parents choose a school for their child

- Growth is paramount (but achievement matters too)
- High-achievers may be a poor match for schools with low achievement, but parents of these students are the most savvy consumers
- How indicators are weighted \neq How information is reported



Why Growth Matters...



-
- State/district replaces principal or staff at a low-achieving, **low-growth** school
 - State/district directs more \$ to a low-achieving, **high-growth** school that is equitably funded
 - Parent leaves a low-achieving, **low-growth** school for a better alternative

- State/district replaces principal or staff at a low-achieving, **high-growth** school
- State/district direct more \$ to a low-achieving, **low-growth** school that is equitably funded
- Parent leaves a low-achieving, **high-growth** school for an inferior alternative

Alabama's "Failing Schools" List

Identifies lowest-achieving 6 percent of schools. Students at these schools are allowed to transfer to "non-failing" public or private schools with their families being eligible for a tax credit to help pay for tuition.

Discussion of "failing schools" in Alabama is limited by the lack of growth measures.

- Some schools on this list may actually be serving students well.
- Some schools that aren't on this list may deserve the "failing" label.

Growth-based school ratings would improve the conversation around school performance.

- Principals and teachers in low-achieving, high-growth schools receive the recognition they deserve.
- Low-growth schools receive appropriate scrutiny.
- Parents in low-achieving, high-growth schools may think twice about leaving.

Alabama's proposed A-F report cards

Like

- Emphasize growth (50% for K-8, 30% for HS)
- Achievement indicator uses a performance index rather than raw proficiency rates
- Graduation weighted appropriately
- College and Career Ready indicator is based on ACT, AP, IB, and college credit *success*
- Include CTE indicators
- Appropriate weights for “all students” versus low-performing students

Dislike

Not much!

However, if the point of report cards is to tell parents how well their kids are being served then there is a case for weighting growth even more heavily.

(e.g. In Colorado, growth measures count for 75% of elementary school grades.)

FIGURE 2: STATES WITH SUMMATIVE SCHOOL RATINGS ASSIGN LITTLE WEIGHT TO “GROWTH FOR ALL STUDENTS”

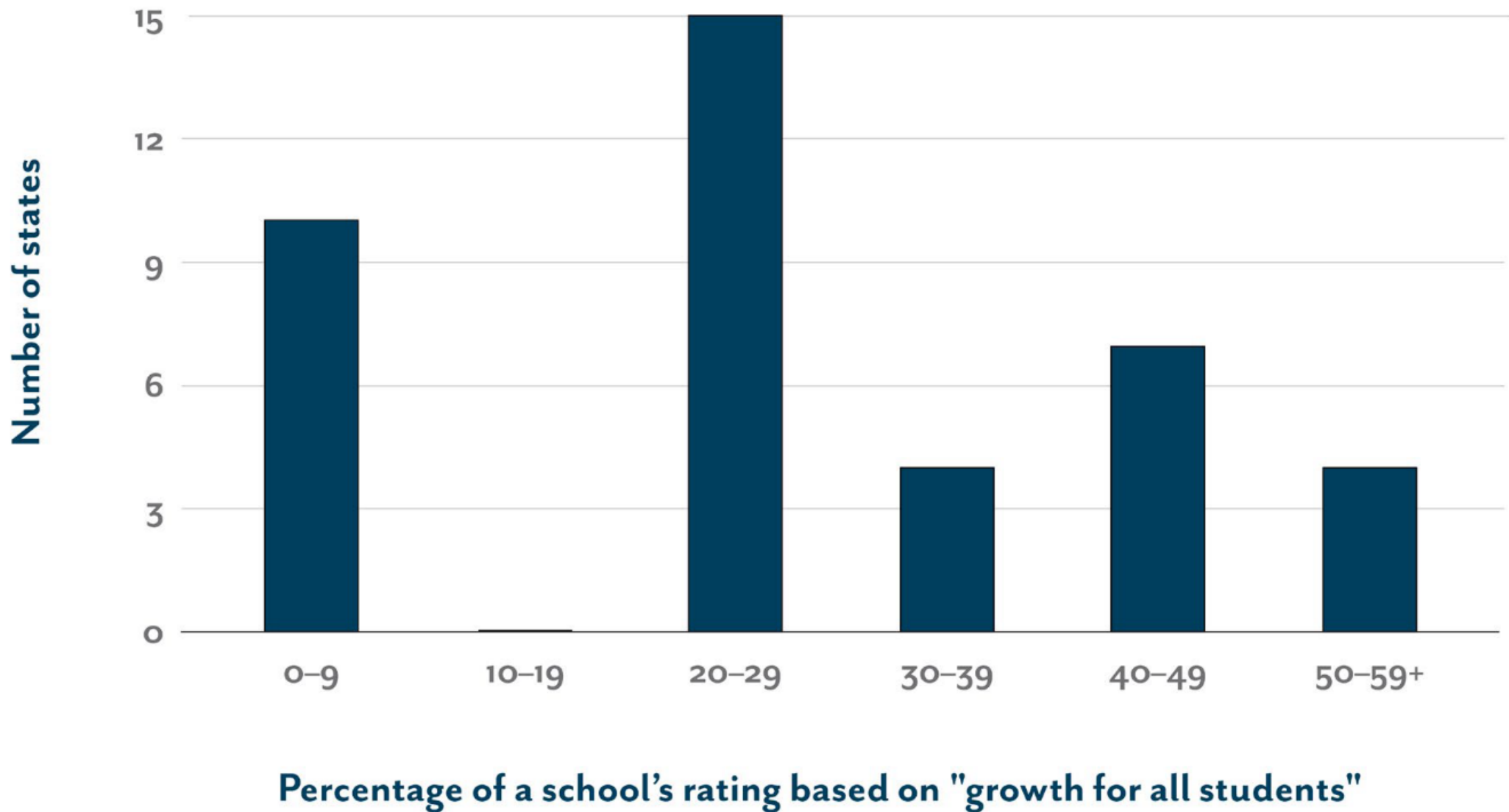
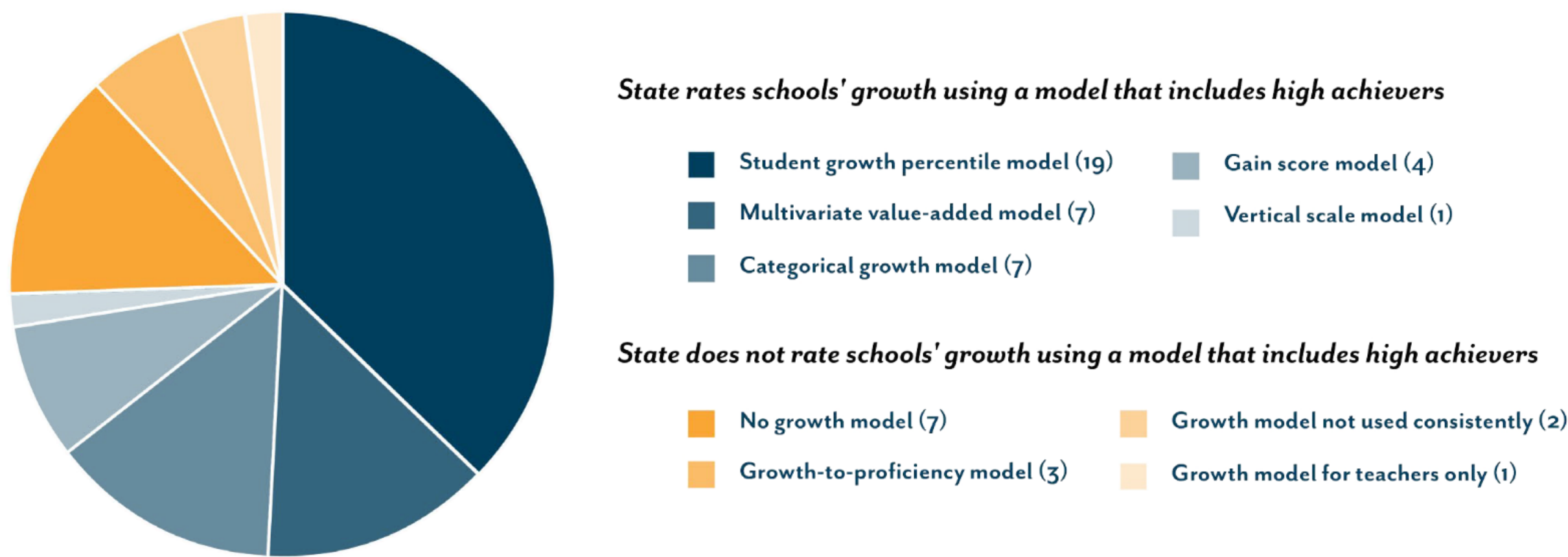
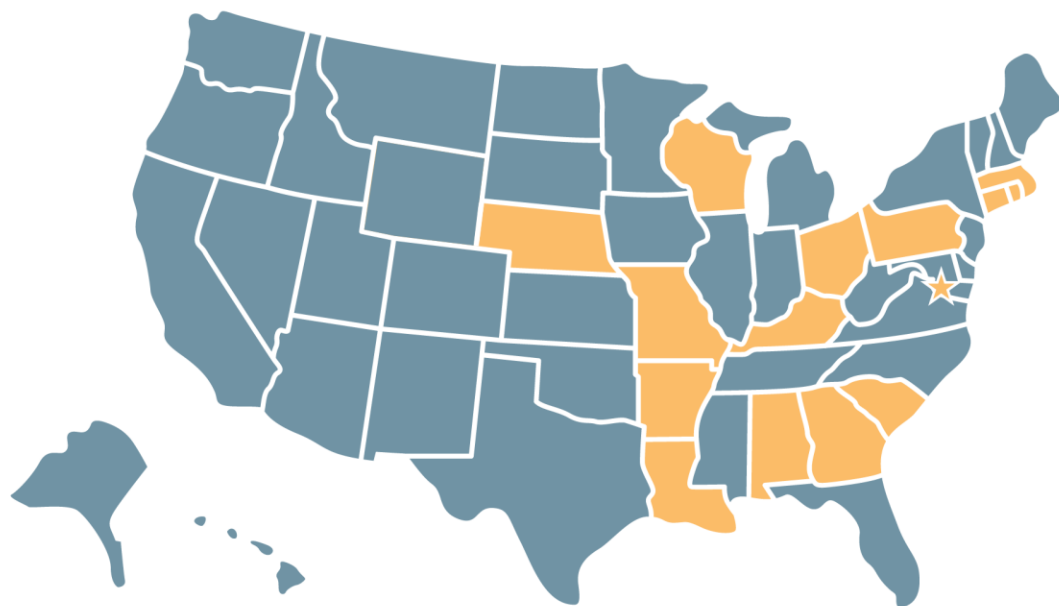


FIGURE 1: MOST STATES RATE SCHOOLS' GROWTH USING A MODEL THAT INCLUDES HIGH ACHIEVERS



FOURTEEN STATES AND THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA RATE OR PLAN TO RATE SCHOOLS' ACHIEVEMENT USING A MODEL (SUCH AS A PERFORMANCE INDEX) THAT GIVES ADDITIONAL CREDIT FOR STUDENTS ACHIEVING AT AN "ADVANCED" LEVEL.

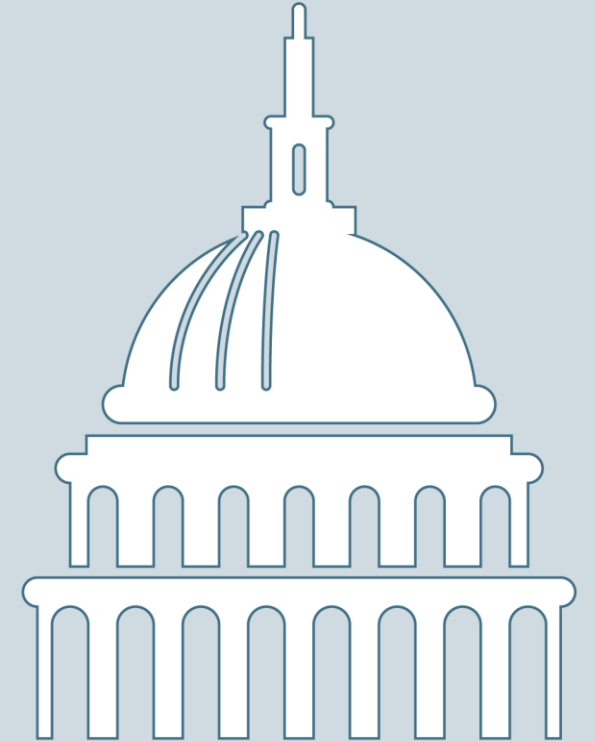


**DRAFT FEDERAL REGULATIONS
APPEAR TO MAKE THESE MODELS
ILLEGAL UNDER THE NEW LAW.**

RECOMMENDATION FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION:

ALLOW STATES TO RATE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT USING A PERFORMANCE INDEX.

Such an allowance is both consistent with ESSA and in the best interests of students. Rather than once again encouraging schools to focus on “bubble kids” as they did under NCLB, the department’s final regulations should allow—or, better yet, encourage—performance metrics that account for the achievement of all students.



Do the following indicators also work for identifying the “lowest-performing 5 percent” of Title 1 schools, as required by ESSA?

Achievement

Learning gains

Achievement gap

Graduation rate

YES

These are great indicators!

BUT

Growth is still best if an intervention is likely!

English Language Proficiency Indicator

- Best measures are individually administered assessments of listening and speaking as well as reading and writing within content areas, so that mastery of academic language can be assessed.
- Using students' gain scores, rather than a metric such as “percent proficient,” encourages schools to support English language learners at all stages of language acquisition.
- Some states have considered including an indicator for rates of English learner reclassification.
 - In settings where English language learners are segregated for instruction this re-designation can enable greater access to the core curriculum.
 - However, tallying reclassifications could incentivize schools to focus on students who score just below the cut off of English proficiency and pay less attention to newcomers. It could also create incentives to reclassify students prematurely.
- Ideally the weight of this indicator vary based on the proportion of students classified as ELL.

The dreaded “school quality” indicator...

- College and Career Readiness
- Access to a well-rounded curriculum
- Attendance/chronic absenteeism
- Student and/or teacher retention
- Climate surveys
- Student surveys
- Parent surveys
- Teacher surveys
- Discipline reports
- “Non-cognitive skills”



Access to a well-rounded curriculum

Pros

“States could collect information about students’ access to a full curriculum, including science, history-social studies, art, music, world language, and physical education. This could provide a corrective to the narrowing of curriculum that occurred in many schools under NCLB. It could also strengthen students’ long-term performance, given the evidence that literacy and critical thinking are not generic skills but instead rely on the content knowledge students have had the opportunity to learn.”

Cons

- Untested, might be vulnerable to some sort of gaming
- Might not generate enough variation to be meaningful

Attendance/Chronic Absenteeism

Pros

- Strongly correlated with long-term outcomes of interest
- Easy to collect

Cons

- Some potential for manipulation

Student and/or teacher retention

Pros

- Positively correlated with growth
- Difficult to game
- Cheap

Cons

- Might be biased somehow

Climate Surveys

Pros

- Numerous instruments have already been developed
- Highly correlated with just about everything we care about
- Mostly good incentives

Cons

- Cost money
- Some potential for gaming (depending on who is surveyed)

Student Surveys

Pros

- Predict school value-added
- Already developed (e.g. Tripod)

Cons

- “You’re going to let the KIDS decide!?”
- Cost money

Parent Surveys

Pros

- Predict school value-added, other important outcomes
- Already used by authorizers
- Easy sell politically

Cons

- Low-response rate could undermine validity
- Cost money

Teacher Surveys

Pros

- Predict school value-added and progress over time when stakes are for teachers are low

Cons

- Vulnerable to gaming
- Cost money

Discipline reports

Pros

- Strongly correlated with growth and other desirable outcomes
- Easy to collect data

Cons

- Vulnerable to gaming
- Ambiguous impact on school environment

“Noncognitive skills”

Pros

- Critical to long-term success
- Researchers will flock to Alabama to study its accountability system

Cons

- Problematic if done cheaply
- Expensive to do well
- “Not ready for prime time”

What I would focus on...

- College and Career Readiness
- Access to a well-rounded curriculum
- Attendance/chronic absenteeism
- Student/teacher retention
- Climate surveys and/or student surveys

Thanks for listening!

**THOMAS B.
FORDHAM**
INSTITUTE

ADVANCING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE